

Theodore Roosevelt State Natural Area

by
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Amid the development and traffic on Bogue Banks, between the Atlantic Ocean and Bogue Sound, there sits an undisturbed 273 acre site that is to be kept in “its natural state”. Literally millions of people drive by this site every year and hundreds of thousands visit it but only handfuls are aware of it. Where is it? It is the Theodore Roosevelt State Natural Area, located in Pine Knoll Shores and it is surrounding the North Carolina Aquarium. What is it? It is a home to eight different natural communities, including the maritime forest, Theodore Roosevelt State Natural Area is truly a treasure for visitors to enjoy.

The land was part of a larger tract that that extended from the Town of Atlantic Beach to one mile west of Salter Path and owned by Mrs. Alice Grene Hoffman. Prior her death in March of 1953, she left the property to her niece Eleanor, wife of Theodore Roosevelt Jr. and their children. In December of 1971, 298 acres were given to the State of North Carolina by the grandchildren of President Theodore Roosevelt. The deed of gift stipulated that the tract of land and its adjacent marshes be “kept in its natural state, maintained as a nature preserve, and used for the primary purpose of nature and wildlife education, estuarine studies, with emphasis on marine life, ecological advances, environmental balance and research in the methods of conservation” The exception of the requirement allowed for 25.04 acres to be used as a Marine Resource Center which is now the North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores.

Managed by the North Carolina Division of Park and Recreation, Theodore Roosevelt is one of 16 State Natural Areas encompassing 27,643 acres. Rangers from Fort Macon State Park patrol the area, document plant and animal life, and with the help of Aquarium staff, maintain the two nature trails. Both trails follow along ancient dune ridges and wind through a landscape that is quickly disappearing along our coast. The Roosevelt trail is 1.2 miles long will take about an hour to hike. The trailhead is located off the western end of the Aquarium parking lot. The Hoffman trail, accessed through the Aquarium, is one half mile long and takes 30 minutes to hike.

The assorted natural communities in a location that is comparatively small to other state natural areas is remarkable. They include maritime forest, maritime shrub, brackish marsh, and salt marsh. In areas between the forested dunes, visitors can experience maritime swamp forest, interdune ponds, small depression ponds and maritime shrub swamps. Many species of plants and animals can be seen in their native habitats. Live oak, laurel oak, holly, cedar and pine make up the majority of the forest canopy while shrub thickets consist of wax myrtle, red bay, and wild olive. Salt marsh cord grass and needle rush can be found along the shallow shores of Bouge Sound. Birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and marine life call these areas home which makes for a great opportunity to view wildlife.

If you visit, please observe the trail head signs which are posted and tread lightly. We benefit today from the decisions of a few to preserve this property. And, it will be here for future generations too. Take some time to explore Theodore Roosevelt State Natural Area; you'll be glad you did.